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E. coli Fact Sheet

What Is *E. coli*?	*E. coli* O157:H7 is one of hundreds of strains of the bacteria Escherichia coli. Although most strains are harmless and live in the intestines of healthy humans and animals, this strain produces a powerful toxin and can cause severe illness. An estimated 73,000 cases of infection and 61 deaths occur in the United States each year.
What are the symptoms?	Symptoms of *E. coli* O157:H7 include watery or bloody diarrhea, fever, abdominal cramps, nausea, and vomiting. Illness may be mild or severe. Usually little or no fever is present, and the illness resolves in 5 to 10 days. Young children are more likely to have severe symptoms, including kidney failure.
How is *E. coli* treated?	Most people recover without antibiotics or other specific treatment in 5-10 days. There is no evidence that antibiotics improve the course of disease, and it is thought that treatment with some antibiotics may cause kidney complications**. Antidiarrheal agents, such as loperamide (Imodium), should also be avoided**.
How do people catch this disease?	Most illness has been associated with eating undercooked, contaminated ground beef. Contaminated meat may look and smell normal. Person-to-person contact in families and childcare centers is also an important mode of transmission. Other possible sources of infection are unwashed vegetalbes, salami, unpasteurized milk and juice, and swimming in or drinking sewage-contaminated water.
What can be done to stop the spread of this disease?	People can help prevent *E. coli* O157:H7 infection by thoroughly cooking ground beef, washing their hands, avoiding unpasteurized milk, and washing fruits and vegetables. Because the organism lives in the intestines of healthy cattle, preventive measures on cattle farms and during meat processing are being investigated.

For more information about E. coli, visit: www.cdc.gov/health/default.htm

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